

Holland and Its Mysterious Racist Black Pete Tradition

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Generally I am proud to be a Dutchman. Holland is in the Top 10 of almost all the important indices, and not only in those about tulips and windmills. I mean, Holland is [number 1 biking country](#) and since last week it exports the [wooden bike](#) (no, not the shoes) to the beautiful city it once founded, New York. But that's not as surprising as the fact that this country is number 4 in the [Human Development Index](#), based on life expectancy, education and adult literacy. Or that it is number 5 in the Digital Access Index and 8 in the [FIFA World Ranking](#) for best soccer nations, just behind Brazil. And as the first country in the world it legalized marihuana, abortion, euthanasia and gay marriage, just to name a few liberal achievements and many countries are now following. Holland is also the proud host of the Greenpeace fleet and as a true David the small country is now protesting against the Russian Goliath that jailed the activists of [Greenpeace](#) ship 'Artic 30'. So far so good, but there's one mysterious stubborn tradition in Holland, fiercely defended by the majority of Dutchmen, as if their whole cultural heritage is at stake: the mysterious, racist tradition of the Black Pete. Did you know about it?

In the USA you have Santa Claus, in the UK there's Father Christmas and in Holland we have Sinterklaas. Next month he will arrive in a boat from Spain, bringing thousands of presents for all the Dutch children, many of them waiting for him in the harbor, singing songs and waving flags. Once ashore Sinterklaas, dressed like an old bishop with a long beard, will continue his journey through the small country on a white horse and around the horse there are always - as [David Sedaris](#) tells us on a hilarious way - six to eight black men. These black men are the servants of Sinterklaas and they all have the same name: Black Pete. They are dressed as Renaissance minstrels with black faces, painted red lips and Afro wigs. They jump around, talk foolishly, make mistakes - like constantly forgetting things - and behave like naughty little boys. For weeks Black Pete's are everywhere, in shops, houses, schools and TV commercials. They distribute candies and presents till the Birthday of Sinterklaas on the 5th of December.

And the next day, they are all gone. But I do remember how I once pointed out to a colored Dutchman with Surinam origin and shouted to my mother: "Look, look, there's still one left!". The man and my mother both looked angry. This is more or less how I learned that I wasn't allowed to say this. I did look over my shoulder though, to be sure if he really wasn't secretly carrying some presents behind his back. Which he wasn't.

More than ever newspapers, talk shows and blogs in The Netherlands debate about the Black Pete tradition right now. The vast majority says the tradition is over 150 years old and kids love it, so why would you fuzz about it? And anyone who dares to share doubts about this tradition or suggests that it looks like a racist happening gets confronted with fierce verbal attacks. Facebook pages like 'Black Pete must stay forever' receive tens of thousands of likes. And amongst the comments you find remarks as 'If the blacks don't

like this they should go back to their country', ignoring the fact that a fifth of the country is colored and most are born and raised in the same Holland.

Thousands of colored people in Holland feel pain and insult by this tradition. The white boss and his black servants sometimes remind them of a much more painful part of the world's history. And when thousands feel humiliated this should be enough reason to change the tradition, don't you think so? Or do we need the United Nations to interfere again? Till 2002 Holland and several other western countries knew stubborn fans of the ages old tradition of dwarf tossing. No kidding! Only after the [UN Human Rights Committee](#) decided in September 2002 that this was a humiliating tradition people stopped tossing dwarfs around. Yes, in case the Dutch can't find the guts, the creativity and honest self-reflection to keep the Sinterklaas tradition alive without the humiliating Black Pete's then I think we must ask the UN to interfere again.

PETITION (under Article 5 of the Dutch Constitution)

The GLOBAL CONGRESS AFRIKAN NETHERLANDS and the following organizations:

- The National Platform Slavery;
- The National Platform Surinamese politicians;
- the European Anti-Racism Network;
- Foundation Honour and Reparations Victims of Surinamese Dutch Slavery;
- Black European Women's Sophie Dela;
- Foundation Afrikan World Studies Institute;
- Integral Management;
- African Youth Movement ADWA Foundation and also
- Stage Kwakoe
- and OPO

in deliberation meeting on Saturday, November 8, 2003 in Amsterdam on 22 November 2003 in The Hague, in the presence of a large number of institutions, respectively

foundations whose objectives, whether or not and, inter alia, that the to draw attention to institutionalized, structural everyday racism, black attention history and imaging of the Dutch of black African descent.

WHEREAS

1. Netherlands is a multicultural society in which people from different cultures and beliefs addition, with respect and understanding for each other to live;
2. The Sinterklaas celebration on 5 December is traditionally celebrated within the Netherlands established order;
3. The Sinterklaas celebration today mainly is maintained by adults because youth sentiments;
4. Several organizations and institutions in society insurmountable moral objections with the celebration of Sinterklaas with matching black helpers and attributes where such specific candy and lyrics;
5. Has been established that the buck dimension intersects with remnants of the developed concepts stemming from the transatlantic (Dutch) colonial and slavery;
6. Actions of various organizations and institutions for almost 20 years aimed at refocusing the concept or abolish the buck element from Sinterklaas because of the racist elements and its psychological impact on black Dutch children of African descent;
7. The Sinterklaas celebration, with its black servants in the concept as expressed brought a negative image into the hands of children regarding Dutch of black African origin, namely the projection of a superior white 'race'

expressed as the good holy man Saint Nicholas against an inferior black 'race' put down as the stupid black piet help, making the superiority versus inferiority thought reigns supreme;

8. the Sinterklaas celebration, with its implicit blame game (institutional) racist because the exploitation by Sinterklaas of black "slaves" / guest workers as helpers;

9. the GAC Netherlands, LPS, and EARN LPSP Netherlands on March 10, 2003, respectively 4

November 2003 have commented on the Sinterklaas celebration through a consultation process with

respect to the input for the National Action Plan against Racism;

10. the chairman of the LPS in her capacity as a member of the former by Minister Van Boxtel

established National Platform Combating Racism concept Sinterklaas celebration as

unacceptable is introduced during the inventory of concepts that negative representation of certain groups in Dutch society maintain;

11. After a reorientation of the Sinterklaas celebration several years ago the Dutch Antilles and Suriname have abolished the Sinterklaas celebration;

12. OPO has successfully implemented at local government level (Amsterdam South-East)

some schools at least the buck element in the Sinterklaas celebration was abolished;

13. The abolition of the Sinterklaas celebration a form of "self-reparation" means and direct

connected with the detraumatiseringsproces of Africans and Africans in the Diaspora and in

same category as the title "Negro";

14. The Sinterklaas celebration with similar racist American Minstrel Shows, which

was famous during the Civil War and was widely respected in the white world, where white workers are dressed schminkten as black plantation slaves, eventually banned because of the very racist elements in this entertainment shows;

15. The focus of this petition lies in fostering an awareness process

Netherlands, as well as in Europe, with respect to the negative, and discriminatory psychological effects of traditional Sinterklaas celebration;

16. a thorough investigation and analysis of everyday institutionalized racism as in the EU under similar circumstances occur, as necessary,

considered to raise awareness about racism and xenophobia more broadly in society promote.

CONCLUDES THAT

1. the cultural celebration of Sinterklaas is no longer of this time;

2. the Sinterklaas celebration by the buck everyday institutionalized racist element elements which should be immediately abolished;

3. the people's representative bodies in the Netherlands and the Dutch Cabinet

duty to combat racism in its full regalia and origin;

4. Dutch all have a duty to combat racism;

5. the Sinterklaas celebration people unconsciously value leaves attach to racism.

PRESENTS UNDER OTHER FIXED THAT

1. not permitted under Article 1 of the Constitution, discrimination on grounds of race;

2. the Santa Claus myth ignores the rights of the individual, in particular the human rights the child enshrined in several international legal standards and values such as the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, the resolution of the GAC

Europe on 5 October 2003 and the UN Durban Draft Declarations and Program of Action and

the resulting Bridgetown Protocol;

3. due to the inclusion of Article 13 in the ECT Agreement, a legal basis which consists of the European Community now take action against states and individuals who are believed to have discriminatory policies or practices in the work

argued, as initially in Evrigenis Report and the Declaration Against Racism and Xenophobia of 1986 specified;

4. By extension, the proposal is made that the EU erasing its obligation racism and xenophobia would emphasize by pointing to statements the Member States additional

of ingrained and whether unintentional racism as reflected in traditional cultural celebrations, such as the Dutch Sinterklaas celebration;

5. Abovementioned proposal relies on feelings as expressed above by including several national and international organizations, who seek to draw attention institutionalized, structural everyday racism;

6. The above proposal has fueled a series of discussions on various forums on the Internet;

7. In the above discussion an abundance of very serious racist remarks towards the Dutch black of African descent is distributed;

AFRICAN, Surinamese and Antillean COMMUNITY IN THE NETHERLANDS,

FOR REPRESENTED BY THE GLOBAL AFRICAN CONGRESS

NETHERLANDS, strongly urges ON GOVERNMENT AND MEMBERS OF THE

FIRST AND SECOND CHAMBER OF STATES GENE REAAL

1. The Dutch State (international) commitment to the eradication of racism and xenophobia would emphasize by its nationals (below) indicate the expressions of ancient, ingrained racism or intentionally. as the Sinterklaas celebration;

2. That the Dutch state the interests of all its citizens in the Netherlands consider

takes, but first suggesting that the rights of the individual never violated should be determined;

3. That the Dutch Sinterklaas celebration, the evaluation issues but does least the buck element with immediate effect abolishes start schools and other public bodies and institutions in the Netherlands;

4. Resources available to the GLOBAL CONGRESS AFRIKAN NETHERLANDS available at

for the development of a project on which to appropriate and dignified way the awareness can be deployed to the side of the Dutch nationals, social institutions and Dutch business;

5. The GLOBAL CONGRESS AFRIKAN NETHERLANDS about the above messages and

as to the steps which will be taken to the prevention of expression of racism and xenophobia directed against individuals and organizations and institutes of African

and citizens in the diaspora;

and proceeds to the order of day.

On behalf of the GLOBAL CONGRESS AFRIKAN NETHERLANDS

Mr Iwan Leeuwin Ms. Amal Shirwa Alhaag

Member of the Management Team President Youth Division

In the presence of a delegation of the above organizations offered at 25

November 2003 in The Hague in the building of the War of the States General to GOVERNMENT AND MEMBERS OF THE FIRST AND SECOND CHAMBER OF THE STATES GENERAL

through a delegation of the Chamber Mrs Ferrier, CDA

Mr. Çörüz, CDA

Mr Leerdam, PvdA

Mr. Brinkel, CDA.

Transcript:

National Bureau for Combating Racial Discrimination

National Institute of Dutch slavery and legacy

Via GAC Europe:

The European Commission

ENAR

UNESCO Paris

Via GAC

The Human Rights Commission of the United Nations